3: Skrine G-3 (1922-1924) 1926 All Sinkiang All

bowler and his own archaic Homburg, one on top of the other, cannot be imagined.

We thought we were going to have the comfortable Mission house to sleep in, but it appeared that owing to a mistake the keys had not been obtained from the missionaries at Kashgar, who are kind enough always to put the house at the disposal of the Consulate if required. Nothing else having been arranged we had eventually to doss down in a small farm-house on the outskirts of the town. It was not very comfortable, but we made the best of it and by half-past six I was able to change my clothes and drive round to call on the Amban, the Commandant and an ex-Amban who was still living in the town. In almost every district we visited in our subsequent wanderings we found one, sometimes two, ex-Ambans. Apparently it takes months, even years, to hand over charge, owing presumably to the mess in which each Magistrate gets his work, particularly the financial side of it. So much so, I believe, that it is the custom in China for his friends to congratulate an official formally on the successful handing over of his charge. Next day before proceeding on our journey, we attended an official lunch at the Yamen, where we were received with much pomp and ceremony including a salute of three "guns," or rather bangs from small mortars stuck upright in the ground. The decorations of the room in which we lunched, though faded, were in excellent taste; red chairs covered with black silk; a few panels of decorative Chinese writing; windows of a kind of fretwork in chaste geometrical designs, with ancient lace instead of glass, and little else in the room beyond the table. A Chinese feast is so long and complicated an affair that it merits more detailed description than I can afford it here, and I must therefore refer the reader to a later chapter.[1] Suffice it to say that we were as much impressed by the courtesy and considerateness of our host as by the fearful tinned and dried delicacies from China Proper such as shark's fin, sea-slugs, fish-entrails, seaweed and bamboo-root on which he appeared to pride himself most. All these *plats* seemed to us to consist of substances either glutinous or messy, or both, and to taste of nothing in particular.

Wayside tea-drinkings similar to those of the day before, but in the reverse order, heralded our departure from Yangi Hissar in a landau kindly sent out for us from Kashgar by the Taoyin. Twenty miles of perfectly flat country, alternating

[1] See Ch. VI, pp. 82–84.

3: Skrine G-3 (1922-1924) 1926 All Sinkiang All

a cosier and more private apartment; she has but one lattice window, but that looks down on to the roof of a carpenter's house, on which the women sit spinning and sewing in the sun all day long; cocks and hens peck about amid heaps of shavings, and children clad in long boots, greatcoat and nothing else peep over the edge into the street, tumble down the ladder into the shop and otherwise enjoy themselves without anyone minding. Children are cheap in this fat, easy-going land.

Khotan, 27th November, 1922.

We have just returned (8 p.m.) from an interesting but arctic dinner-party at the Yamen. Our hosts, the Amban and Commandant, had arranged a theatrical performance for the occasion, a great honour. D. and I were met within the Yamen by two parallel processions headed by our hosts and their wives respectively; I was led with much ceremony to one dinner-table and D. to another separated from the men by a low partition. The travelling company's stage was set in the open courtyard opposite us.

The prevailing note of the decorations was red; the walls of the Yamen building behind were covered with fine scarlet embroidery and scrolls of the same colour inscribed with Chinese characters in gold; under-foot were red Khotan carpets, while from the roof of the portico and the branches of the trees in the courtyard hung scores of red Chinese lanterns. Most of the latter were of paper, but several of them were of the beautiful and fantastic hexagonal pattern with panels of embroidered silk and long coloured tassels. Major Ma told me that most of the embroidery had been done by Turki women in Khotan, but he hastened to add that the Khotanis had learnt embroidery from the Chinese.

The dinner lasted some four hours, and the theatrical performance went on all the time.[1] After sunset the temperature sank to several degrees below freezing-point, and I nearly froze to death. The Chinese never mind how cold it is, for their winter clothes and boots, lined with fur throughout, are as admirably designed to withstand cold as their summer costume is to keep its wearers cool. D. says she was better off, thanks to large braziers which were kept under the table well stoked with wood-embers. She was charmed with the little Chinese ladies, who wore the regulation black satin tunic and trousers and their hair scraped back and twisted into small buns lavishly decorated with ornaments of jade and precious stones. By far the loveliest of her hostesses, however, was a Turki girl from the Titai's household at Kashgar, who was married to one of the military officers. She had, according to D.—I missed this vision—a perfect profile and small oval face, a complexion like a wild rose and large limpid dark eyes; her voice, like those of the beauties of Kashgar, had a kind of uneven tone with long, full, liquid notes.

The ex-Amban's mother, with whom D. exchanged calls yesterday, was not at the dinner. She, according to D., might have stepped straight out of a fairy-story. She looks about a hundred and fifty, wears a black silk handkerchief tied round her head like a pirate, and owns an enormous woolly black cat which adores her and sits all the time licking her hands and face.

[1] For a description of a Chinese theatrical performance, see pp. 245–7.

3: Skrine G-3 (1922-1924) 1926 All Sinkiang All

342 duty as a chimney, open during heavy rain is solved in an ingenious fashion. The felt cover is pulled almost but not quite over it; the corner of the felt opposite to the direction from which the rain is coming is then lifted on the end of a forked pole away from the rim of the "chimney," thus making a kind of vertical ventilator facing away from the rain. The other end of the forked pole is held firmly in mid-air by means of guy ropes attached to the sides of the tent. *Aq-ois* stand a gale very well, their shape being such that the higher the wind the more firmly the structure is pressed to the ground; I never heard of one being blown away. To make assurance doubly sure, however, a large stone is sometimes placed in the tent and the woodwork of the roof anchored to it by a rope.

The putting together of the *aq-ois* is always done by the women, who are remarkably quick about it. I have seen a large one put up by two girls in half an hour. A middle-sized *aq-oi* forms three camel- or yak-loads when taken down. For short distances it can be moved bodily by ten or twelve men, who range themselves round the *inside* of the structure and lift it at a given signal. As they cannot see where they are going, they have to be steered by some one outside.

353 The interior of a typical *aq-oi* is full of interest. A fire burns merrily in the middle and a cauldron of *mach* simmers gently upon it. Farthest from the door is the *ashkhana* or kitchen, screened off from the rest of the hut by gaily-coloured mats made of reeds tightly wound with dyed wool. In this sanctum the goodwife keeps her milk, cream and curds in vast wooden bowls; it is really a dairy, not a kitchen. Another arc of the circle is occupied by a row of very young lambs, which lie or stand tethered closely to a rope pegged down along the walls. In wet weather the young lambs, if any, are kept most of the day inside the tents; once when I took refuge for the night in an *aq oi* and threw myself down upon the felt which had been spread for me, I was astonished to feel what I thought was a pillow under the top end of the rug move when I put my head on it; it was a solitary lamb, very woolly and very surprised.

352 Round the walls, from the convenient pegs provided by the upper ends of the trellis, hang all kinds of odds and ends; *bashtiks* or bright-hued saddle-bags of patchwork or painted leather, sieves, fur-rimmed hats, big balls of newly-spun wool, skins full of curds, hatchets, *chapans* or quilted coats and so on. There will usually be a *dotar* or long-stemmed guitar made from a gourd, and an ancient matchlock of immense length with a

[534 411]

depends on his herds: they are his only resource, his only wealth, and his only pride. When two nomads meet, whether they are Kazakhs, Kirghiz, Mongols, or Tibetans, the first subject that comes up is their cattle. Among nomads, social status is established by the possession of horses, camels, and livestock in general, and only secondarily determined by titles or descent. This is especially true for the Kirghiz, Kazakhs and Tibetans, and to a lesser degree for the Mongols, among whom aristocratic birth (real or imagined) plays an important role.

The average nomad's life can be described as follows: he lives in a roomy felt tent, furnished with house altar, in the case of Buddhists, or with an artistically made book-stand for the Quran in the case of Muslims, and some chests and carpets. The whole family takes care of the livestock, and periodically the migration unit moves during the summer time from pasture to pasture, preserving the richest and most protected grazing land for the winter time. The weather plays a fatal role in the welfare of the nomad's livestock, and every so often a migration unit (the ail, the aul, the ayir, the omoq, otoq, xotn, or uruq, the ulus or even the aimaq) loses its livestock. In this case, those clans which still own enough livestock divide their herds and lend part of them to those who suffered the loss. Collective cooperation is exercised in this respect by Kazakhs, Kirghiz and Mongols, while the nomadic Tibetans, in a similar situation, have quite a reputation for robbing neighboring tribes of their livestock.

The nomadic way of life, the close contact with nature and dependence on nature promotes animism, shamanism, and spiritualism, which goes hand in hand with the prevailing religions of Islam (in the case of the Kirghiz, Kazakhs, Salars, and some Tibetan clans) and Buddhism (in the case of the Mongols, Tibetans, and Sarigh-Uighurs). As a general rule, the nomadic Kirghiz and Kazakh are not very fanatic or ardent Muslims, and neither are the Mongols very pious Buddhists, but still, both feel strongly about their religious although they are rather lax in their observance. No matter how poor a Buddhistic nomad is, he voluntarily supports and feeds wandering lamas, invites several on major occasions (birth, death, and marriage if the bride's father can afford it), pays them, and finally is accustomed to the old tradition ot giving a small percentage of his livestock every year to Buddhistic monasteries. All nomads are very superstitious, and the relationship between cause and effect is often misinterpreted, e.g., in the case of disease or weather. It is safe to say that the dominant motives of the nomads are economic in the first place and religious in the second place.

C. The Kirghiz

563 1. The people

[771] Taking Tien-shan as a whole, the Kirghiz form the leading element of the population. They are Mohammedans of the Suni [642] order, but they are not strict followers of their religion. Their [622] system of government is patriarchal, control of the different sections being vested in tribal elders who enjoy almost unlimited authority. The elders (Manap) are chosen by the people, and regarded with honor and respect.

[233] The people are nomads whose main occupation is cattle rais- [241] ing. Only a small proportion of the population engages in farming.

563 2. Patterns of living

342 a. Dwelling

[184] The Kirghiz do not live in houses. The poor live in shelters made of branches under trees or against overhanging rocks. The rich live in tents, smaller and less ornate than the Mongolian yurt but more solid with thick layers of felt. A light tent is called an aq-ai. It stands a gale very well, as the shape is such that a high wind presses the structure even more firmly to the ground. To make it more stable, a large stone is placed in the tent and the woodwork of the roof is anchored to it by a rope.

[354] The shape and structure of an aq-ai are similar to those of the Mongolian yurt, but the interior arrangement differs. A fire always burns cheerily in the middle and a cauldron of mash [353] simmers upon it. At the far end is the kitchen, which is screened by gaily colored mats of reeds tightly wound with dyed wool. [251] Here the housewife stores her milk, cream and curds in vast [231] wooden bowls. When the weather is wet, a row of young lambs occupies one corner of the tent. They are tethered closely to a rope pegged down along the walls. Saddlebags, sieves, hats, [353] wool, coats, skins and so forth are hung along the tent walls. Piles of rolled-up felts and rugs occupy about a quarter of the circumference of the tent. The wealth of the owner may be guessed from the size of the piles.

563 The interior decoration in the tent of a wealthy Kirghiz is 342 often artistic. The walls are hung with embroideries made by 352 the women, and the ground is covered with carpets. There are 353 also pillows covered with multi-colored chintz of Chinese or Russian manufacture. Furniture is not generally used. There is [415] an occasional table, a few copper pots and pans, and some brass jugs used for boiling water and making tea.

563 b. Food

262 Staple foods for the Kirghiz are barley, bread, milk and its 252 products, such as sour cream and qurut, a kind of cheese. In most tents there are cauldrons of brewing mash, a mixture of flour and milk. Qurut is made by drying sour cream in goatskin.

/Western Mongols or Torguts/

As their forefathers had much contact with the Russians and the Chinese, they are more or less influenced by the culture and civilization of both. The Chinese influence appears to be the strongest.

Largely nomads, the West Mongols live a life similar to that of their nomad brothers of Inner Mongolia. Only as a last resort do they abandon tent life and take up agriculture.

The nobles who live in cities dwell in houses that are a combination of Tibetan and Occidental architectural style, flat-roofed, whitewashed, and with walled-in courtyards. Like the Chinese, they sleep on k'angs. One often finds Russian furniture in the house, Chinese embroideries decorating the walls, and red silk draperies with Mongolian mottoes.

The ordinary people wear long gowns of Chinese cut, but the customary Mongolian sash and equipment (see clothing section of IMAR Handbook). A young man wears a long gown with a sleeveless velvet waistcoat on top. Formerly, the officials wore silk robes of Chinese cut, and the decorative cap of Imperial times with a peacock feather to signify the position of chieftainship. Nowadays they wear a Chinese style long gown with a sleeved jacket (ma-kua).

Food of the West Mongols is similar to that of other nomadic peoples, but when the rich entertain, the cuisine is a combination of Mongolian, Chinese and Russian styles.

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vegetables and fruit, especially grapes and apples, find a ready market in the capital. The grapes were the largest we had ever seen, and we carried in the cart an abundant supply which more than made up for the lightening of our load by the bread we had consumed! We were now only a few miles from the Manas River, which is the most important stream in this part of Turkestan. Its source is in the Celestial Mountains, but it finally loses itself in the sand. A little earlier in the season, when the snows were melting, the Manas River is often impassable, and a Chinese lady friend had a few weeks earlier been upset into the water and nearly lost her life. We were now in the last days of August, and it was already cold in the heights of the Tian Shan, therefore we had no cause to fear the sudden treacherous rise of the water which comes from the melting snow, and we crossed without difficulty.

Our next stopping-place was Ulan-Usun—'Blue Water'—where we had the advantage of occupying the inn room which had been papered and swept for the use of the Governor's son, who had preceded us on his way to Zaisan. Fresh red paper with eulogistic phrases decorated the door frame; clean matting covered the *kang*, and the court had been generally tidied up in honour of such an important guest. The flies, however, still remained.

The country here was splendid grazing ground, covered with tall 'chi-chi' grass. The Mongolian nomads pitch their tents on this plain during the winter months, when the cold drives them down from the higher pastures.

Our driver, though a surly cross-grained fellow, was beginning to thaw under our constant friendly advances. His knowledge of Chinese was very poor, but the present of a bunch of grapes or a piece of new bread,